

# Past and future of the European landscape

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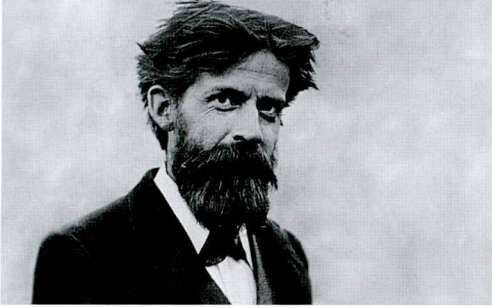
I have been given a very ambitious title for this talk – the past and future of the European landscape. I am neither a professional historian, nor a prophet. But I hope to provoke you as you look back to the past and forward to the future.

**L**andscape – a concept and word which I believe was first used in your country – was defined for the purposes of the European Landscape Convention as ‘... an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’. So, landscape for this purpose is not an existential idea, but rather a place *as perceived by people*, and indeed (over most of Europe’s surface) as in large part created or heavily influenced by people. If I was talking about the past and future of nature, or of biodiversity, I would have to start the story long before human beings arrive. But with landscape, the story starts when mankind begins to interact with, and to act upon, the land, changing it and becoming in due course increasingly aware of the beauty of the land and the impact on it of human activity. I propose, which may surprise you, to structure my talk around the teachings and activity of a person who had remarkable influence around Europe a century ago. I am speaking of Sir Patrick Geddes, Scotsman, botanist, geographer, economist, sociologist, teacher and provocateur, author of ‘Cities in Evolution’. He was born in 1854 and died in 1932. He is seen in my country as the founder of town planning, and as the first great interpreter of the environment. He was in close touch with leading thinkers around Europe; organised summer schools, training courses and

conferences in different places within this continent; advised on city plans and local development in Scotland, Ireland and France, and also in Palestine and India; and towards the end of his life created and ran the Scottish College in Montpellier, France. He provoked the thinking of his contemporaries, and was described by one as ‘a most unsettling person’. My own thinking, and that of many of my British colleagues, has been much influenced by the teaching of Sir Patrick Geddes. As the structure for this talk, I will offer – in turn – six of his key ideas, which I hope will illuminate the past and future of the European landscape.

## PLACE, WORK AND FOLK

Geddes adopted, and vigorously applied, the trilogy offered in the 1850s by Frederick Le Play – Place, Work and Folk (*Lieu, Travail, Famille*). Le Play was a mining engineer, turned social scientist, whose passion was to understand the different places within Europe, the resources and the constraints within each place, the impact of these upon the activities or work of the people who came to live there, and the social life of the people which arose from the place and the work. His view was that one could not understand the work and the folk – which we now call economy and community – without understanding the place, which we now call environment. Geddes, as a botanist and geographer who



Sir Patrick Geddes (1854-1932).

trained himself also to become an economist and sociologist, grasped this triangle as the key to understanding communities. He saw the multi-directional links between the three main elements, whereby place influences work, work shapes the community, the community (through its activities and work) shapes and re-shapes the environment.

These links epitomise the history of human inter-action with the land. Ways of life evolve as human communities discover how they can live, work and thrive in particular places; and the ways of life progressively shape the place. Where communities are stable within a place over a period of time, the people and the place become tuned to each other, and the people (with their senses and sympathies) may become deeply rooted in that place. Long before the word 'landscape' entered the human language, people felt and expressed deep appreciation of the place in which they lived.

My travel, research and campaigning in over 30 European countries during the last 25 years have given me a strong sense of the emotional link between people and landscape. One research study, in particular, focused on 'Protected National Landscapes in Europe' for Scottish Natural Heritage (of which Niek Hazendonk undertook the chapter on the Netherlands) gave me a strong sense that each nation in Europe has a collective psyche, which may be strongly reflected in its people's attitude to landscape. I take the risk

of epitomising these attitudes in key words for each country:

- Germany, Austria, Slovenia - forests and/or mountains;
- Italy - cultural heritage of cities and historic towns;
- Netherlands - battle with the sea, leading to orderly management of land and water;
- France - strong sense of regional cultures;
- England - feudal approach to land rights, and a romantic sense of natural beauty;
- Norway, Sweden, Finland - mountains, forests and lakes.

This emotional link, if properly understood and appealed to, may be a powerful force in efforts to secure the future well-being of European landscapes. People will support public efforts, and will themselves act, to protect and maintain the character of the landscapes that they value. Their actions may reflect instinctive respect for traditional landscape values; continuance of traditions in land management or building design; and acceptance of collective disciplines. I offer an example from the Saarland, where many farmhouses have been converted into homes, sustaining their traditional character.

#### THE VALLEY SECTION

Frederick Le Play, and Patrick Geddes as one of his followers, were acutely aware that places vary widely across Europe, and that they change over time. Places vary because of their latitude, altitude, geology, geomorphology, climate, vegetation and other natural factors ... and, when human beings come into the story, because of the impact that human activity has had upon them. Places change over time because of changes in climate or other natural forces, but crucially because of human evolution and the changing desire and ability of people to work the land, build, settle, move and transform the environment to meet their perceived needs.

In order to capture, interpret and synthesize this variety of places and their change over time – in all the rich variation which we now see as



**mountain forest moorland hills upper valley plain estuary coastline**  
**hunter forester miner**  
**grazer terrace-builder farmer**  
**trader craftsman processor retailer**  
**industries larger towns cities ports**



Adapted version of Geddes' diagram of the Valley section.

one of the glories of the European landscape – Patrick Geddes offered the idea of the Valley section. He saw the Valley as a metaphor for both natural diversity and human progress. If traced from the mountaintop to the estuary and the sea, a Valley may offer the whole span of habitats, natural resources and constraints which underlie the different kinds of place where people can (or sometimes cannot) work and live - for example high mountains, forests, moorlands, lower hills, upper valleys, plains, coastlines and the estuary itself. Traced in the same way from a human perspective, the Valley offers a metaphor not only for the variety, but for the evolution of human activity and impact upon the land – from the hunter, forester and miner in the mountains to the grazer and terrace-builder on the lower hills, the agrarian communities and trading settlements, and on down to the processing industries, larger towns, cities and ports in the downstream part of the Valley. I offer below my adapted version of Geddes' diagram of the Valley section.

To illuminate my theme of landscape, let me point out how the gradation down the Valley tends to be associated with rising

density of population; with increase in applied technology; consequently, with increasingly intense human adaptation of the land; and with increased speed of physical change in land use and settlement patterns. Moreover, it is in the lower valleys that we tend to find the larger cities, the regional or national capitals, the centres of empires, the rise of cultures which influence whole regions or nations and which may flow back up the Valley to bring national flags and national building styles to mountain villages. In a similar way, the lower Valley (with its navigable river) and the estuary symbolize the link between one country or another, international trade, and the emergence and progressive strengthening over past millennia of cultural links around the world, to the point that we have today a palpable and increasingly uniform global culture.

These factors, which one might summarize in the single word 'civilization', have had profound and accelerating effects upon landscapes. They have contributed to the extraordinary richness and diversity of places, and to the complex overlay of features from different eras in human history which can be found in almost every corner of the usable land

in Europe. These factors – and notably those of technology, world trade and global culture – have also greatly increased mankind’s ability and propensity to destroy the physical features made or valued by previous generations. As an example of the impact of global culture upon landscapes, consider the widespread obsession with the television programme ‘Dallas’. The design of the mansion at South Fork is echoed in much modern housing in Europe, for example estates built by Barratts, the largest private developer in England; and I have found similar echoes in the mountain villages of Portugal and Croatia.

The story of landscape, as an idea in its own right, springs from rising awareness of *both* the wealth of inherited physical heritage *and* the destruction of that heritage. These may be epitomised by the Grand Tour of classical sites in Italy and around the Mediterranean by the aristocracy and intelligentsia of northern Europe in the 18th century; and by the agonized question from the poet William Wordsworth, ‘Is then no nook of sacred ground secure from rash assault?’ Wordsworth was writing in 1810, at a time when the Napoleonic wars had put an end to the Grand Tour, so that English travellers had stayed at home to appreciate their own beautiful country and were visiting the Lake District in such numbers as to threaten radical change to that beautiful landscape.

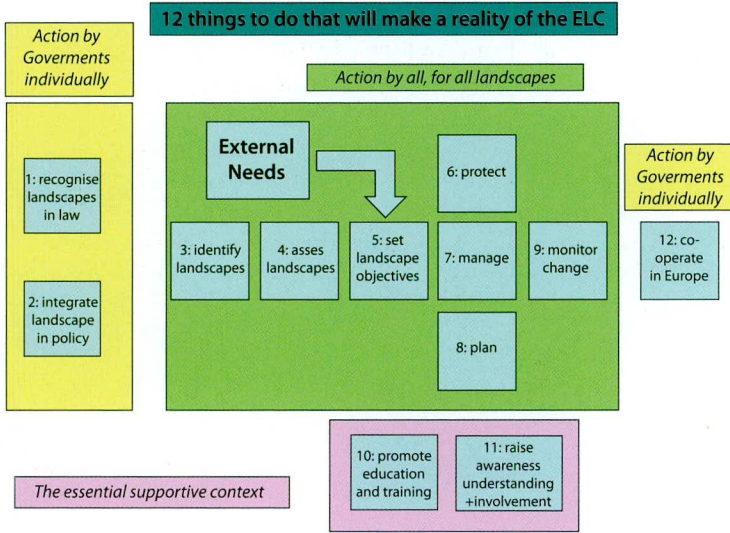
An ironic feature in the story of rising awareness of landscape in my own country, England, is that William Wordsworth, who did so much to celebrate and popularise the landscape, also wished to limit access to it by the *hoi polloi* for fear that they would ruin it. In terms of the Le Play triangle, one might say that he wanted the place without the work and the folk! But others who were writing at, or soon after, the time were focusing on the other two sides of the triangle. Social reformers such as Chadwick and Dickens were campaigning to redeem the evils of child labour, long working hours, insanitary housing and lack of sewerage. By the middle of the 19th century, the

industrial workers of Manchester were forming naturalists’ associations and rambling clubs and using the newly created railways to escape at weekends from the noxious air of the cities into the clean beauty of the countryside. So, by the time that Patrick Geddes was starting his life’s work in the 1880s, the intellectual agenda clearly embraced place *and* work *and* folk, together with an underlying goal of improving the life of all people.

#### SURVEY, ANALYSIS, PLAN

If that was the goal, how was it to be pursued? I have already described how Le Play, as a social scientist, travelled widely around Europe to study human communities, focusing in each locality upon the factors of place, work and folk. Patrick Geddes embraced this approach, with an even stronger emphasis upon the things that were wrong with the present situation, and the action that was needed to put them right. So, he developed a three-part process of survey, analysis and plan, which has become the central approach in the field of town and country planning. Survey involves the objective appraisal of the physical place, with its resources and constraints; of the economy, with its strengths, weakness and potential; and of the community, with its demographic structure, services and unmet needs. Analysis takes this appraisal and applies the questions, ‘So what? Does the situation need to be improved? And if so, how?’ Problems are identified, optional solutions are shaped, the people are consulted, conclusions are drawn. The third stage, creating the plan, is then undertaken.

In all this process, Geddes sustained the crucial equilibrium of the triangle of place, work and folk. He would not protect the environment at the cost of social suffering, nor damage the place in order to create work, nor house the people better while leaving them unemployed. He sought always what we would now call ‘win-win-win’ solutions. Later, I will emphasise the importance of this approach in the field of landscape, and offer examples of such win-win-win solutions.



### WORKING WITH THE PEOPLE

In preparing surveys and plans, Geddes did not operate as an elite expert, but rather as an animator of the people. He was influenced by the ideas of Auguste Comte (1798-1857), founder of positivism, an ideology of which the core aim was to achieve the well-being and progress of all mankind; of the Russian prince Kropotkin, who was a peaceful anarchist advocating mutual aid and cooperation in society, author of *Fields, Factories and Workshop* (1888); and by the thinking of other anarchists such as Elisée Reclus, author of the *Géographie Universelle* (1894). These inspired him with the idea that regeneration in a depressed area is best achieved through action by the people themselves and what we would today call ‘empowerment of communities’. The key was to empower residents to achieve a better environment for themselves rather than waiting for action by government or charitable agencies.

Two examples can illustrate how Geddes pursued this idea. The Old Town of Edinburgh, with tall stone buildings in multiple occupancy approached through narrow alleys and small courtyards, was a fairly squalid place when he started working there in 1890. Over the following 20 years,

he animated the residents to take direct action to improve their own environment, refurbishing the tenements, cleaning out the alleys, cultivating the courtyards. Later, when he was active in India, he tackled dirt and disease in overcrowded slums by organizing mass processions of the people, with enormous models of rats and fleas to dramatise the clean-up action was needed; and he persuaded the people, and through them the officials, to open up small healthy spaces among the slum houses (a process that he called ‘conservative surgery’) instead of clearing whole neighbourhoods to make space for the typical engineer’s solution of wide roads.

When we came, in 1994-98, to prepare the European Landscape Convention, we embraced in our thinking these ideas of survey, analysis and plan and of working with the people. This is reflected in the 12 verbs which are at the heart of the Convention - see the diagram above.

I will refer later to other elements in this diagram. At this point, please note boxes 3, 4 and 5, which are the direct equivalent of survey, analysis and plan. A number of European countries, including my own, have developed the techniques for a three-step process. The first is to define an area which



Gross Glockner, Austria, 2005 (photo: Yvon Wassink).

has a distinctive landscape character, different in definable ways from the adjoining areas; and then – objectively, and without making judgments – to identify the elements, natural and man-made, which make up the character of the landscape. Where time and information permit, this survey stage includes a record of the natural and cultural heritage contained within the landscape area.

The second step is then one of analysis or assessment, in which one judges the features which give quality or distinctiveness to the particular landscape area; the features which contribute positively to its character, and which should be protected or sustained; and the features that are in discord to that character, and might therefore be screened, removed or improved.

The third step, the setting of landscape objectives for the area, is the equivalent of Patrick Geddes' 'plan'. It builds on the assessment phase by proposing the actions that could be taken, and the policies that should be applied, in the area, in order to sustain the quality and distinctiveness of the particular landscape area, to protect the positive features

and (where possible) to screen, remove or improve the discordant features. But this is not always a 'straight-line' process, focused only on the internal features in the area. The proposed actions and policies must take into account external needs which impact on the area, for example proposed extension to settlements, significant change in land use or major infrastructure projects. The need is then to building consensus around those proposals, through *processes of public consultation*; and to formalise that consensus into a policy document and action plan.

Please note my emphasis upon processes of public consultation. In the same spirit that Geddes applied to working with and involving the people, those who wrote the European Landscape Convention were insistent, from the beginning of their work, that: 'Every citizen has a share in the landscape and in the duty of looking after it'. For that reason, the Convention applies to *all* European landscapes – urban, peri-urban, rural and coastal; those which are ordinary or despoiled as well as those which are exceptional – for the reason that they form the setting of people's lives and

work, and are of value to all Europeans. The public should take an active part in caring for landscape; and should be involved in setting the landscape objectives and indeed, ideally, in identifying and assessing landscapes. My own European organisation, ECOVAST (the European Council for the Village and Small Town), has developed techniques whereby ordinary people can undertake such work, and I am happy that these techniques have been used here in the Netherlands.

### MULTI-DISCIPLINARITY

I have described how Patrick Geddes, by initial training a botanist and geographer, trained himself to become also an economist and sociologist because he recognized the crucial triangle of place, work and folk. He knew that effective and sustainable action to improve the well-being of communities depended upon a true professional understanding of environments, economies and communities. So, he worked with an ever wider range of thinkers and of academic disciplines, and was a dedicated inspirer of debate and of multidisciplinary work. He organized summer schools, conferences and exhibitions. He was an inspiring teacher and an inspired

interpreter, for example in his development and use of the Outlook Tower in Edinburgh, with its successive floor-levels of displays related to the geography, history and human environment of Edinburgh, Scotland, the English-speaking world, Europe and the globe. This kind of multi-disciplinarity is of crucial importance as we think about the future of the European landscape. The European Landscape Convention brought together, for the first time, the two great lines of thinking about the European heritage -- those for nature conservation, typified by the Berne Convention; and those for the cultural heritage, typified by the Granada Convention. We, in the ELC team, saw landscape as the linking force between these two traditions and – more widely – as the frame or platform within which the interests of the natural and cultural heritage might be reconciled with the collective needs of people, now and in the future.

In the drafting of the European Landscape Convention, I was influenced by my own professional work in England. At that time, I was Director General of the Countryside Commission, responsible for the nationwide programme of landscape assessment in



§ Hadrian's Wall, England to the South of the Scottish border (photo: Henk Baas).



Italy, 2006 (photo: Yvon Wassink).

England, which led to the publication of the national map in the series of regional reports under the title 'The character of England'. Two different government agencies, the Countryside Commission and English Nature, were then responsible separately for landscape protection and for nature conservation. I worked closely with my opposite number in English Nature, to bring together these two broad aspects of the heritage into a single frame. We tried to bring in also the cultural heritage, for which yet another agency, English Heritage, was responsible. This was not easy, because the landscape of England (like that in much of Europe) contains, if you know how to 'read' it, the traces of so many human generations who have lived upon and worked the land. Assessing the present features in the landscape is a relatively quick process, but it may take

many years of field study and desk study to gain a true understanding of the many layers of history which are written on the face of the land. In more recent versions of the 'Character of England' map and accompanying text, my successors have been able more fully to reflect the landscape *and* the natural and cultural heritage. But the different professions who have concern with landscape must face, over the coming decades, a major challenge of interdisciplinary work to truly understand landscapes that we inherit, the natural and cultural heritage which they embody and the processes by which this heritage may be reconciled with the collective needs of people. The multiplicity of disciplines which may be needed in order to understand landscapes, and the processes which affect them, is matched by the wide range of organizations and professions which must share the task of




protecting, managing and planning landscapes. The European Landscape Convention (which at June 2012 has been ratified by 37 of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, including 23 of the 27 member states of the European Union) requires each signatory government to recognize landscapes in law, and to '... integrate landscape into ... regional and town planning policies and in its cultural, environmental, agricultural, social and economic policies, as well as in any other policies with possible direct or indirect impact on landscape' (Article 5d of the Convention). Most crucial among those policies are those related to spatial planning, nature conservation, cultural heritage, forestry, agriculture, water management and transport. Policies and actions in all these fields provide opportunity to sustain, enhance or damage the quality and individuality of landscapes. The future of the European landscape will depend to a large degree upon the extent to which policies and actions in all these fields can be sensitised to landscape values.

**THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL WILL**  
The sixth, and last, of the ideas that I draw

from Patrick Geddes is a phrase that is now widely used, and which few people realise came originally from him, namely 'Think global, act local'. I have already, when speaking of the Valley section, described how the downstream end of that symbolic Valley is extended to embrace links to the whole world. The lives of people everywhere, the work that they do or are prevented from doing, and their impact on the land are increasingly affected by global forces. These forces include world trade, freedom of movement, growth of population, rising aspirations within the population, rising pressure on resources such as land, water, minerals and oil, and climate change. The most striking, and often truly devastating, impacts of these forces upon landscapes and upon natural and cultural heritage are at present seen in continents other than Europe, for example the clearing of rainforest in South America, south-east Asia and west Africa, the flooding of great valleys and the headlong growth of cities in China, the drying out of lakes in Russia and of rivers in Australia. But Europe too faces massive challenges of change, including in-migration from the rest of the world, movements of people from



 Bay of the river Somme in France (photo: Henk Baas).

rural to urban areas in Eastern Europe and the periphery of this continent, movements outwards from the cities in Western Europe, continuing growth of cities, updating of transport systems, changes in farming practice to cope with global competition, and increasingly desperate and varied efforts to sustain economies.

Those who have responsibility for the well-being of folk or work or place are increasingly forced, by hard financial or other realities, to take account of these global forces and these challenges of change. At this particular moment, in the midst of an economic crisis, political and other thinking is becoming increasingly skewed towards economic and social priorities, at the cost of environment. Thus the equilibrium between place, work and folk is threatened. But that equilibrium is of crucial long-term importance to the health of the planet and its people ... and that is why we must continue and strengthen the focus on sustainability in all policies at global, European, national and regional level *and* ensure that this policy focus is fully reflected in what happens on the ground. The

20th anniversary of the Rio conference is a good time to reaffirm our commitment to sustainability, and to update it by commitment to sustain the quality and diversity of Europe's great heritage of landscape.

At the heart of the European Landscape Convention is the action that needs to be taken at local level to protect, manage and plan landscapes. The three activities – protection, management and planning – are defined thus in the Convention:

- 'Landscape protection' means actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity;
- 'Landscape management' means action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes;
- 'Landscape planning' means strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.



Flint Castle in Flintshire, Wales (1277-1286) (photo: Henk Baas).



S Saint-Père in the Morvan, view from the old town of Vezelay. The Morvan is one of the 48 'Parcs Naturel Régional' of France. Protection of these 'nature parcs' is also focusing on preservation of the historical landscape (photo: Henk Baas).

The balance between these three activities will vary from place to place. In the core area of a National Park, or a cultural area with World Heritage status, landscape protection will be the dominant concern. In an area despoiled by mining, or by industrial dereliction, there may be need for radical landscape planning. Almost everywhere, throughout what Geddes called the Valley section, there is need for landscape management in order to maintain the quality of the place over time and to harmonise the changes which inevitably happen because of natural forces and human activity.

In these processes, we need constantly to seek the win-win-win solutions that will secure the well-being of place and work and folk, of environments and economies and communities. I end this talk by offering examples of such win-win-win solutions, through which the quality and diversity of the European landscapes can be sustained into the future.

#### *Protected areas*

National parks, regional parks, landscape zones and nature reserves throughout Europe have attracted growing popular support, particularly where the protection and management of

landscape is effectively linked to the social and economic well-being of local people. For example, the Regional Park of Normandie-Maine in France created some years ago at Barenton the House of the Pear and the Apple (*Maison de la Poire et de la Pomme*). This centre, based in disused farm buildings, provides advice and support to farmers in the region who grow apples and pears and who make cider, calvados and poirée. Tourists can visit the centre to study a display about this activity and to see orchards of different regional varieties of apple and pear. They can then follow *itineraires* which take them by car to visit local farms, where they can taste and buy the fruit and the drinks. This creates social contact between visitors and farmers; enables farmers to gain full value for the products; and sustains the viability of this farming and of the traditional orchard landscapes of Basse Normandie – a true win-win-win solution.

#### *Agri-environment schemes*

These schemes are now a compulsory element of all EU-funded Rural Development Programmes, provide grant-aid to farmers to look after features of landscape and of natural and cultural heritage. They help to sustain the

income of farmers, the continuation of farm families as a key element in rural communities, and the quality and diversity of distinctive landscapes. Such schemes are now widespread within the European Union, and means are being found to bring their benefits to further regions. For example, the peasant farmers of Transylvania are still pursuing their 500-year old tradition of collective grazing by cattle and sheep. The private land of each such farmer is usually too small for him to be eligible for agri-environment payments: but the farmers in some areas are now being helped by non-government organizations to work collectively in claiming the grants, in order to sustain landscapes and habitats which are renowned as among the finest in Europe.

#### *National forest*

The National Forest in the centre of England is a major example of successful landscape planning. Over the last 20 years, a territory of 500 km<sup>2</sup> despoiled by coal mining, clay digging and industrial activity has seen its landscape transformed by widespread planting of woodlands and creation of public green spaces, with facilities for recreation. The woodland cover of the area has increased from 6% to 19%. Many jobs have been created in landscape work, tourism and processing of

woodland products. The immediate setting of people's homes throughout the area has been greatly enhanced, and property values have risen sharply. The initiative has earned an enthusiastic response from local people. Many hundreds of local people have been involved directly in tree planting and other work.

#### *Rivers and canals*

In many European cities, rivers and canals have been treated as backwaters in the life of the urban community, often neglected, polluted, fringed by industry or derelict land. In recent decades, many of such waterways have been opened to the public view and have become focal points for urban regeneration. Their lively landscape forms an increasingly valued setting for homes, offices, leisure and tourism activity. A dramatic example is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, which has transformed the image and enhanced the economy of that city.

#### *National Trust*

My final example is the National Trust, which protects and manages a formidable portfolio of landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This portfolio includes over 100 great historic houses, with their parklands; over 100 great gardens; over 400,000 ha of fine

Old Sarum, the site of the earliest settlement (3000 BC) of Salisbury in England. Old Sarum was originally an Iron age hill fort strategically placed on the conjunction of two trade routes and the River Avon (photo: Henk Baas).





 Staigue Fort in Kerry, Ireland, probably built in the Late Iron Age (300-400 AD) (photo: Henk Baas).

countryside; and 800 km of fine coastline. The Trust is known for high standards of protection and management of this heritage, based upon the expert knowledge and skills of its multi-professional staff. But equally remarkable, and significant for my present purpose, is the degree of public support for the Trust's work. It has over 4 million members, paying substantial annual subscriptions; it benefits from the service of thousands of volunteers; and it receives tens of millions of visitors a year to its properties. This provides formidable proof of popular support for the long-term task of sustaining our heritage and landscapes.

### CONCLUSION

The landscapes of Europe, which we inherit from past generations, form a rich and varied tapestry across the face of this long-settled continent. These landscapes embody a wealth of natural habitats, and rich and intricate layers of history. Collectively, they are a massive asset to Europe, and are embedded in the psyche and the emotions of its people. They have changed over millennia, to reflect the changing

ways of life of the people who have shaped them. Change has accelerated during the last two or three centuries, including the impact of global culture, standardised building materials and high technology. As a result, we have seen rising public and political awareness of what may be lost, in terms of quality and variety of landscapes, if we fail collectively to find a new equilibrium between the landscape heritage and modern social and economic needs. The European Landscape Convention provides a conceptual and political framework for the collective effort that is needed – an effort which must involve many professions, many organisations and departments of government at all levels, and an active citizenry.

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